75¢

VOL. 11 NO. 5
MARCH 1981
ISSUE NO. 220

RAIL TRAVEL NEWS

APR 11 1981 AM
MONTOURSVILLE PA 17754

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FIRST CLASS

LETTERS

I can't believe you made the comment (RTN 216, p. 19) about Jimmy Carter's Department of Transportation being "one of the best yet." Granted, there isn't much in the way of stellar performance by USDOT by which to measure, but memories don't have to be very long to bring to mind some glaring non-accomplishments by the Carter/Goldschmidt team. The level of incompetence exhibited by USDOT under the "leadership" of Carter and Goldschmidt was right up there with the rest of Jimmy's bungling.

During the Carter/Goldschmidt tenure, DOT lobbied long and hard to try to reduce our already pitifully inadequate passenger rail system even further, thereby threatening the entire Amtrak concept. If they had been successful, Carter and Goldschmidt would have achieved the non-accomplishment of destroying any semblance of a nationwide passenger train system. As it was, in spite of considerable opposition from more farsighted Congressmen, the Carter/Goldschmidt team succeeded in wiping out such national assets as the NATIONAL LIMITED, the LONE STAR, the HIAWATHA, the much-maligned (but salvageable) FLORIDIAN, and a badly needed Florida train. In the face of increasing passenger train usage by the public and increasing problems with motor vehicle fuel, a more stupid example of being penny wise and pound foolish cannot be imagined.

If this striking effort to harm the general welfare of the United States were not enough, there is the emerging corridors fiasco at which to point. Surely it has not escaped your attention that the Carter/Goldschmidt DOT so tortured and twisted the available data as to come up with the conclusion that the desert terrain between Las Vegas and Los Angeles offered the prime opportunity for development of rail passenger corridors--meanwhile completely ignoring such good candidates as Cleveland-Pittsburgh, Detroit-Cincinnati, Chicago-Des Moines, Omaha-Kansas City, and Boston-Portland ME. I cannot tell whether this non-accomplishment was the result of rampant stupidity and incompetence at DOT, misguidance from above, or a combination of both. At any rate, here is proof beyond doubt that the Peter Principle is alive and well and living in Washington.

True, Goldschmidt did seem to be a strong supporter of urban mass transit, to his credit. But neither he nor anyone else among Jimmy Carter and chums did anything about a major problem for rapid transit cost: the Davis-Bacon Act, which imposes artificially high and unnecessary wage rates on all Federally assisted construction. In fact, the Carter administration consistently opposed repeal of this outdated law.

The impact of Davis-Bacon is to make rapid transit construction on which even $1 of Federal aid is spent cost about one-third more than it otherwise would--the taxpayers' money poured down the drain. Here was a golden opportunity for Goldschmidt to support something useful, but he did not.

The only thing which those of us who are interested in the well being of the United States can hope for (as regards public transportation) is that the Reagan/Lewis DOT will display considerably more aptitude and competence than did the Carter/Goldschmidt DOT. The initial signs are not good. Congress to the rescue again, maybe.

Ross M. Goddard, Jr., President
Georgia Association of Railroad Passengers
Decatur, Georgia

Rail Travel News, Vol. 11, No. 5. March, 1981. Whole number 220.
Copyright © 1981 by Message Media. Published twice monthly by Message Media, P.O. Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. Subscription $18.00 per year; single copy 75¢. Overseas and institutional rates on request. STAFF: James Russell, Editor. Paul Rayton, Editor-at-Large. Regional Correspondents: Peter Putnam Bretz, Southern California; Jack Ferry, Illinois; Adron Hall, Mississippi; Kenneth Maylath, Maryland; Peter Roehm, Massachusetts.

Gee whiz, fellas, I wish you'd have let us know you were so hard up for material that you'd devote 3½ pages of an issue (RTN 218) to an idiotic press release about the new California State Railroad Museum. The space would have been better filled by just about anything.

I don't know about you, but that piece has given me nightmares, visions of entire freight trains floating in the air, ersatz people growing in gardens and operating ticket windows in the facades of stations, sleeping cars swaying while standing still--I can well imagine that the place'll be a "living museum." In fact, if I resided in Sacramento I'd live in constant dread that the entire installation would one night rear up and eat the city, much in the manner of the Blob, Godzilla and other "living" things. California sure doesn't do things by halves; all that's missing are the mummified remains of Casey Jones.

The best "artifact" will clearly be that jumping-bean sleeping car, where lo and behold, folks'll be able to experience what it was like way back when there used to be trains, then it's off to the People Garden for a little rest and relaxation (if you don't mind mannequins staring at you) before that long drive home.

No thanks. I think I'll just spend a nice quiet decade or two at home.

Michael Leighton
Mt. Kisco, New York

I do not mind making sacrifices when others are doing equally, nor do I begrudge a cutting back of the growing Amtrak network if the other modes are equally trimmed. Apparently this is not to be the case, however, and the highways are to emerge triumphant over all others. Talk about anachronisms! How tragic!

NO! Let's have no more of this lopsided logic! If users are to pay their own way forthwith, and Amtrak fares are to be raised, kill the highway trust fund immediately. No more tax money to subsidize the trucks and buses!

When 60% of Americans want a transportation system representing modal balance, why is this outmoded, energy-foolish scheme being foisted upon us? When are we going to see the high-speed rail services so badly needed on our frontal range?

I voted for Reagan to see wrongs righted. What a let-down!

H. Howard Noble
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Peter Bretz, in the Fort Leonard Wood Special article (RTN #216), writes: "Approaching St. Louis, we do not, for some reason, go directly over the Eads bridge, but turn north over the TRRA and snake up to Merchants bridge, then down again the other side of the Mississippi." The "some reason" for not crossing the Eads bridge is simple: it can't be done! The TRRA stopped using the lower deck (the upper deck is, of course, a highway) in 1974, and later tore up all the tracks leading to the bridge on the Illinois side.

The use of the Merchants Bridge intrigues me. In my frequent trips in and out of St. Louis until as recently as July 1979 aboard the late lamented NATIONAL LIMITED, less than 3 months before the NATIONAL was dropped, Amtrak used the MacArthur Bridge for access, involving a swing to the south from Conrail's end of track for the approach to the bridge, then across the river and across MoPac into the station--once Union, most recently the temporary Amtrak building. My first run across the MacArthur Bridge was in 1975, my last four in 1979. I believe MacArthur was in use by Amtrak since 1974, as I'd seen published photos of the NATIONAL on MacArthur in late 1974 or early 1975.

As a curious coincidence, only two weeks ago a St. Louis developer announced that he was considering trying (for the second time) to buy the Eads bridge, which is a national landmark, from TRRA for a most unusual use: Donn H. Lipton has in mind using the lower (ex-rail) deck as the site for a row of two-story townhouses! Tenants would use the upper deck for parking. TRRA says that the bridge is for sale, as it has been on an intermittent basis since 1974. TRRA claims to lose $200,000 to $300,000 a year in maintenance and taxes on the bridge, despite a toll of 35¢ a car charged to commuters using the bridge.

William D. Benswanger
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

RIDING MEXICO'S "WILD WEST" TRAIN
by Sylvia Blishak

(Part two - conclusion.)

As we climb into a spiral tunnel, the train crew wakes up from naps on the bunks below to join us in the cupola. They have brought a huge picnic basket filled with hard-boiled eggs. We have brought our own picnic, and eat it here in our own "private dome caboose". While we American ladies save our beer bottles and orange peels, planning to deposit them in a wastebasket later, the Mexican trainmen toss all their litter out the window. Looking ahead, we see arms and elbows sticking out of the second class windows--an occasional bottle or apple core can be seen flying out as well. Our new friends lend us a helping hand by seizing our bottles and flinging them into the canyon below. With local customs honored, and appetites satisfied, we turn to conversation. (Luckily, Blanca is fluent in Spanish and serves as interpreter--these men speak no English at all.) She soon discovers that the man opposite here is the freight crew's conductor. We urge her to ask him if he can arrange a cab ride for us.

"We are railfans," she explains in Spanish, "and we were wondering if you might talk to the conductor of the passenger train and find out if we might have a ride in the cab of the diesel?"

After he replies, Blanca translates for us that he would be pleased to arrange a cab ride, and he will do so as soon as we reach San Rafael, a few minutes up the line!

We pull into San Rafael station in a highly excited state, grab out belongings, and run to the head of our train. (Our freight conductor, who is a bit rotund, proceeds at a much more leisurely pace.) By the time he rejoins us, Blanca has expressed our interest in a cab ride to the passenger conductor just coming on duty. He looks at us in distress, wrings his hands, and asks in incredulous tones, "Cuatro... cuatro?" Clearly he is not enthusiastic about having four "Americana" tourists in the cab of his lead diesel!

The engineer comes over and joins the conversation. He has no objection, and when Blanca explains that I am writing an article about the railroad, he says he would be flattered to have us join him. However, the conductor is unimpressed. By the time our freight conductor arrives on the scene, a difference of opinion is in full swing. But he adds his considerable weight to our side of the argument, and soon all is arranged. We are climbing into the cab of the orange diesel!

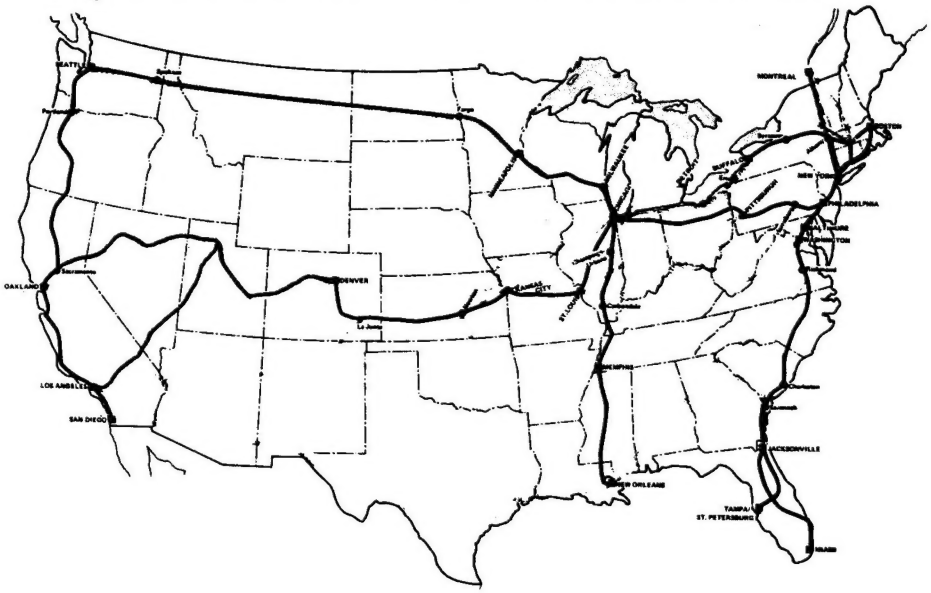
The cab is large, with plenty of room for four extra people. (Having seen only cabs of steam engines before, it seems quite spartan to me, lacking all the mysterious gauges, handles, and dials that steam engines have.) Most of the equipment is contained in a console on the engineer's side; there is only a seat on the left side of the cab. A tool chest rests on the floor by the rear bulkhead, and a picture of Jesus wreathed in haloes is affixed to the forward bulkhead.

Now our cabooses are switched off, and Mixed Train #5 becomes Passenger Train #5. Thru Blanca, I ask if I may blow the horn to signal our departure, and the engineer nods approval, indicating a black handle placed vertically on top of the engineer's console. I push it twice and produce two loud blasts--what a thrill that is!

San Rafael's station is located at one side of a gorge, and as our diesel, and the one behind it, begin to rev up, the grumbles and whines echo off the rock cliffs. Our excitement, of course, revs up right along with the engines! Our engineer, like the leader of a one-man band, manipulates levers and handles, producing a thoroughly satisfactory variety of brake hisses and engine growls. He is in radio communication with the conductor via a phone receiver almost constantly. I notice that on the middle of the forward bulkhead there is a small rack holding three glass balls filled with what appears to be water.

(continued on page 20)

AMTRAK BUDGET SITUATION CRITICAL, BUT THERE IS BELIEVED TO BE SOME HOPE



Since our last issue, there have been signs that the Reagan Administration has been softening somewhat on the issue of the Amtrak budget, in the wake of pressure from passenger train advocates. However, the problem remains "critical," NARP said. On Mar 19 the Administration presented to Congress proposed legislation that still asks for only $613 for Amtrak in its fiscal year 1982 budget, far short of the $853 million compromise figure Amtrak is asking (originally $966 million). However, the DOT has indicated that the Administration's original demand that Amtrak cover 80% of its costs thru revenue from ticket sales is unrealistic, and the proposed legislation asks for 50% coverage (actual coverage is now 41.1%) and cutting out the lesser-performing routes. The bill would also increase the states' shore of 403-B train costs to 50% the first year, instead of the present 20%. Amtrak commuter trains would have to be paid for by state and local governments entirely.

In a Mar 27 interview with FRA Administrator Robert Blanchette, UPI reporter Don Phillips was told that the DOT "will cooperate with Congress and Amtrak to maintain a national passenger train system if it is made more efficient and is structured for passengers to pay at least half the cost of their trips." Blanchette said that the Administration's $613 million "bare bones" budget was "not written in stone and could be increased somewhat for efficient and needed trains." He said that it is not right to fund a "rolling national park" and that Amtrak could find more means of economizing, such as better labor contracts. He wants 50% of fully allocated costs to be covered from the farebox. "When the stomach starts to shrink, the head starts to think", he noted.

The DOT has been developing a proposed Amtrak system map (see above), according to a report in Travel Management Daily (Mar 25), which retains only selected lines outside the NE Corridor (the map was prepared by RTN from sketchy information available). The system it represents was said to be composed of: the NE Corridor,

one train to Montreal (possibly the ADIRONDACK, as shown on our map), the Empire Service minus the LAKE SHORE LIMITED, one train to Florida, the BROADWAY LIMITED, the CITY OF NEW ORLEANS, the EMPIRE BUILDER, the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR rerouted via St. Louis and Kansas City, the DESERT WIND, the COAST STARLIGHT, and the SAN DIEGANS. All other Amtrak passenger trains would be dropped. There would be no service at all in Michigan, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico (to name some major states now served), and there would be no 403-B trains. While there is probably little chance that the Amtrak system would end up precisely like this, the map gives some indication of the relative merits the DOT is placing on various routes.

On Mar 23 Sen. Mark Andrews of ND, chairman of the Senate appropriations transportation subcommittee, said that "If (Amtrak) is not going to be a national system, support's going to erode quite rapidly (in Congress)--I'd rather try to keep Amtrak a national system."

The National Association of RR Passengers on Mar 27 held a news conference at which it announced that it had sent a telegram to DOT Secretary Drew Lewis which read as follows: "(NARP) hereby requests that you immediately cease and desist misrepresenting the facts about passenger train ridership in the United States. In numerous appearances before Congressional committees, newspaper, TV and radio interviews, you and your subordinates have been quoted as saying that Amtrak trains are empty and that nobody is riding the trains, or that less than 1% of travelers in America use Amtrak. We urge you to tell the people of America the truth. Over 20 million Americans rode Amtrak last year. This year's ridership growth is largely outside the Northeast. Space is hard to obtain on many trains, and other trains have operated with standing room only. You have taken an oath of office as Secretary of Transportation, not as Secretary of Automobiles. We respectfully request that you no longer mislead Americans into believing that Amtrak is a hopeless endeavor at a time when people are using the service where it is available, and when the service has just been improved..."

A NARP spokesman told RTN that since the Amtrak legislation won't be completed by Congress before its Easter recess, it is urgent that passenger train supporters contact their Senators and Congressmen during the Easter recess time. For the Senate, that is Apr 10-20, and for the House Apr 16-27. A personal visit to the local office of one's Congressman would be especially helpful during that time. Ideally, a group of supporters could phone in advance for an appointment to talk with the Congressman's staff or with the Congressman and present the facts on passenger train matters. Congressmen need to know that there is a "big public outcry" about the proposed Amtrak cuts, NARP said. One must assume that the entire Amtrak system is in jeopardy. "A national system is by no means guaranteed at this time", NARP said.

An Amtrak spokesman told RTN that the lawmakers in Washington "just aren't getting the message" that Amtrak trains are full. They seem not to be aware that Western trains, for example, are running with big crowds and are sold out for many advance dates.

RAIL CANADA

BRITISH COLUMBIA RAILWAY has been the subject of newspaper reports that the provincial government has agreed to pay the costs of restoring the railway's service to its earlier level. But the BCR told RTN that it doesn't know when restoration will happen, and that new equipment must be purchased and the old upgraded before service levels can be restored.

VIA RAIL CANADA will seriously consider electrifying its passenger equipment with head end power. In a Mar 20 article in Le Droit (Ottawa), Jim Foster, director of VIA mechanical services is quoted as saying "We would like to have a plan ready in a few months. If we convert the cars, we would like them to be used for another 15 or 25 years." Foster also indicated that the only new equipment on order consists of 50 LRC cars and 21 locomotives, with the first going into service next fall. He said that preliminary bids have been received for 60 RDC cars, but the federal government hasn't given VIA the authorization to purchase them.

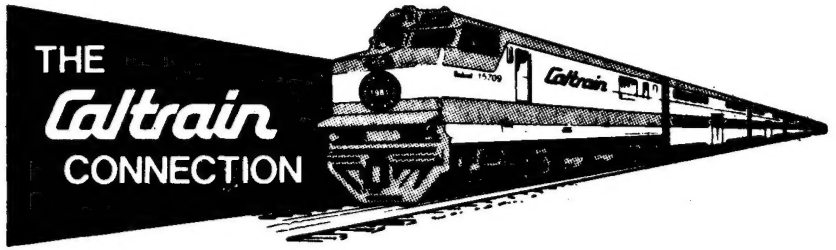
THE ELECTION OF a Conservative government is seen as a favorable sign for rail development in Ontario, as the liberals are considered pro-road, anti-rail. Margaret Scrivener was reelected, and her policies for rail development could likely lead to Detroit-Toronto upgrading and connections.

DEPUTY TRANSPORT MINISTER in Ontario has expressed interest in having a Michigan Corridor study done for UPTRANS being extended to Detroit-Toronto services. Transport 2000's executive director Nicholas Vincent has been to Toronto to discuss such a possibility, and his suggestion got a positive reception from an Ontario Ministry of Transport & Communications Deputy Minister.

THE PROMISED UPGRADE in frequency and lowered fares on CN and CP commuter lines in north and west Montreal will have to wait until June, as will a westward extension of the Metro. Both would boost VIA and Amtrak ridership thru better connections. The upcoming provincial Quebec election in April could hurt the plans for Montreal public transit tho, for Claude Ryan's Liberals are known for pro-freeway sentiments, and may slow or halt progress if elected, if their official program is any indication, with its lack of mention of public transit.

SUPER CONTINENTAL ROUTE was blocked when a CN coal train derailed west of Blue River, B.C. on Mar 13. The eastbound VIA train halted at Kamloops and the westbound at Jasper, with passengers bused between them. On Mar 5 a freight derailed and caught fire 6 miles west of Edmonton, causing VIA passengers to be bused between that city and Jasper. Helicopters dropped water on the flaming train. On Mar 11 a VIA train and a derailed CN freight car collided at Moncton, N.B., injuring several passengers and a CN engineman. Passengers were placed in the last three cars and hauled back to Moncton. The CTC is investigating.

URBAN-SUBURBAN TRANSIT



PUBLIC HEARING NOTICES were published in late March by Caltrans regarding grant applications to UMTA for capital improvement and operational assistance funding for the San Francisco-San Jose commute line. Hearing dates are Apr 29 in San Mateo (City Council Chambers), May 6 in San Jose (160 Park Ave), and May 13 in San Francisco (3333 California St). Written testimony may be sent by Jun 15 to Caltrans, PO Box 3366, Rincon Annex, San Francisco CA 94119. The family plan weekend fare has been extended thru April (see last issue).

WALL STREET JOURNAL of Apr 2 carries a long article on the financial crisis that is being faced by mass transit.

LOS ANGELES OFFICIALS, wanting a rapid decision on whether the transit sales tax hike voted in last Nov is legal under Proposition 13, have planned a strategy to force a decision on it. If it is found legal, the basic 50¢ transit fare can be retained for three years.

COMMUTERS IN PHILADELPHIA were reported surviving well in spite of the transit strike that began Mar 15.

THREE DAYS IN THE LIFE OF AMTRAK

UNUSUAL OCCURRENCES OVER THE AMTRAK SYSTEM DURING THREE DAYS IN MARCH, AS TAKEN FROM OFFICIAL RECORDS. BEAR IN MIND THAT THESE ARE EXCEPTIONS THAT PROVE THE RULE THAT AMTRAK PERFORMANCE IS BETTER THAN EVER THIS YEAR.

March 10:

The WASHINGTON IRVING (train 72) and unnamed train 483 were annulled between Albany and Schenectady NY because the brakes could not be released on Turboliner unit 189. Taxis were called for 18 passengers. The problem was corrected, and train 72 then ran, originating in Albany.

The PIONEER (train 25 of Mar 9) was delayed 122 mins at Glenns Ferry, Idaho (between Pocatello and Boise) because F40 engine #225 was losing power. UP engine 3644 was added as far as Portland, where F40 engine 227, taken from today's train 26 consist, was added.

On today's southbound CRESCENT (train 19), 11 members of a highly publicized group, Guardian Angels, were traveling to Atlanta, their fares paid by a charity group, to lend their assistance in the Atlanta child murders. TV crews were on hand at Washington to film them. Amtrak authorized gratis meals for the group.

A passenger tripped and fell when detraining from the southbound COAST STARLIGHT (train 11) at Eugene. An ambulance crew administered first aid.

A special train was run for the Philadelphia Orchestra Phila-New York and return.

There were no standees reported on trains today.

Trains were on time with the exception of the following significant delays:

The NIAGARA RAINBOW (train 64) lost 25mins when F40 engine 337 had cab signal problems.

The BROADWAY LIMITED (train 40) was delayed 38mins at Chicago due to a loose electrical cable between cars 3110 and 8508. 22mins were gained by Crestline OH.

The SILVER METEOR (train 88) was delayed 15mins at Washington because of a loose electrical cable between cars 3118 and 8517 (this was train 88 of Mar 9).

The BEACON HILL (train 153) was delayed 10mins at Boston when RDC #38 lost head end power and also had an accidental emergency brake application.

Train 103 lost 17mins at two Corridor locations when the brake system lost air due to a leaky valve in Metroliner car 883.

The CONGRESSIONAL (train 187) lost 49mins at various places when Amfleet car 21248 was found to have a broken-off main reservoir drain plug.

Metroliner 111, running with Amfleet equipment, had a similar drain plug problem on car 21073, and also brakes were sticking on cars 20019 and 21144, causing the train to lose 19mins near Washington.

Metroliner 122 (Amfleet) lost 13mins at Washington with the same problems as 111 after car 21073 had been repaired.

Metroliner 125 lost a total of 27 mins at 4 locations with pantograph problems.

The SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR, train 6, was running 27mins late at Hastings NE--it lost 15mins due to signal failure at a snowshed at Norden on the SP, and 20mins due to signal problems at Brush on the BN.

The NORTH STAR, train 10, was 32mins late at LaCrosse, losing 15mins for slow orders on the Milwaukee, and 17mins between River Jct and LaCrosse when all signals were red.

The SILVER STAR, train 81, was running 17mins late at Savannah, time lost on SCL.

The INTER-AMERICAN, train 21, was 40mins late at Poplar Bluff MO after a late arrival of engines in Chicago, a fire in the battery box of car 20006, and unexplained slow running near St. Louis. Northbound train 22 was 81mins late at Little Rock, after having been 122mins late at Ft. Worth; delays included 32mins for the connection from train 24 at Temple (which was late due mostly to freight train interference and a meet with the eastbound SUNSET), 17mins for a coal train meet at Granger, and 22mins for a work crew at Crowley.

The SOUTHWEST LIMITED (train 3) was 16mins late at Newton due mostly to mechanical problems with F40 engine 292 and signal failure.

Car 2900 on the northbound CRESCENT (train 20 of the 9th) was without heat.

March 11:

The SALT CITY EXPRESS (train 62) stopped in Marble Hill NY when a fire broke out in the filter compartment of rear Turbo unit 157 (consist of train: Turbo units 156, 173, 189, 157). The fire department extinguished the fire, and the train reached New York 67mins late. Train 75 (WASHINGTON IRVING), using no. 62's equipment, was looped at Grand Central so as to put Turbo 157 on the rear as it left New York. In order to avoid excessive delay to train 75 at Albany by setting off Turbo 157 and replacing it with #154, train 75 was terminated at Albany, and passengers were taken by taxi to Schenectady. Train 484 (unnamed) was annulled Albany-Schenectady.

At 1pm an ICG freight derailed 6 cars while moving from #2 yard track to the southbound main track at Brookhaven, Miss., 23 miles north of McComb, blocking both main tracks. The southbound track was open at 3:40pm. Train 58, the CITY OF NEW ORLEANS, was delayed 14mins.

The SILVER STAR, train 81, was delayed 119mins at South Hanlet NC when an SCL freight train had an engine failure.

The INTER-AMERICAN, train 23, was delayed 140mins when a Santa Fe freight derailed in the Belleville TX yard, blocking the main track.

A passenger on the CRESCENT, train 19, reported her wallet stolen; not located.

A passenger on the SILVER METEOR, traveling to Jesup GA, was accidentally carried to Jacksonville FL.

The QUAKER CITY, train 225, had 57 standees reported at Newark.

Train 347, the ILLINOIS ZEPHYR, was found to have a defective electrical connection at car 21232, and the car was removed, with no substitute available. The train's departure was delayed 43mins.

Metroliner 110 had pantograph problems with car 823 south of Landover, delaying it 22mins.

Northbound COAST STARLIGHT (train 14 of Mar 10) at Klamath Falls was found to have damaged brake rigging on transition coach 39911--a brake beam was sheared off at the bolts. Car was removed here, and also baggage car 1216 ahead of it, since it would not mate with Superliner cars. Baggage was forwarded by truck. 34mins lost.

The PIONEER, train 25 of Mar 10, had cab signal problems with F40 engine 204. UP engine 2018 was added between The Dalles and Portland. No delay.

The LAKE SHORE LIMITED (train 49) was delayed 33mins at Albany with electrical power problems. At Syracuse it was delayed 17mins more when car 1261 had problems with the door closing and car 1614 needed an adjustment.

Train 21, the INTER-AMERICAN, was delayed 15mins at St. Louis for minor repairs to F40 engines 322 and 299.

The MONTREALER, train 60, was delayed 12mins south of Landover when an unknown person pulled an emergency brake cord.

Southbound COAST STARLIGHT, train 11, was 59mins late at Klamath Falls: 48mins of that was for two freight meets on the SP and 11mins was to remove a disorderly passenger at Klamath Falls. The northbound STARLIGHT of this date left L.A. 15mins late because a disabled SP freight was blocking the train at Mission Tower. By Davis it had made up 7mins time.

Train 36, the DESERT WIND of Mar 10, was reported 26mins late at Milford. Loss of time was mostly due to a freight meet and to SDP40F engine speed restrictions between Las Vegas and Milford.

March 12:

At 1:15am CST an SP freight derailed 16 cars at Marfa TX, between Alpine and El Paso, blocking the single main track and siding. The track won't be reopened until midnight. The SUNSET LIMITED, train 1 of Mar 11, is held at San Antonio, and passengers are offered alternate transportation. Most of the passengers opted to stay on the train. One bus was called to run to L.A., and free meals would be provided

for passengers taking the bus. After 4hrs, 13mins at San Antonio, the train ran on to Alpine and was held there. The track was reopened at 7:40pm.

The BLACK HAWK, train 371 of this date, and train 370 tomorrow, were annulled after an ICG freight derailed 10 cars in Chicago between Ash and Hawthorne Streets. Passengers were bused.

The EMPIRE BUILDER, train 7, running at 69mph at 9:40pm CST, struck and killed an unidentified woman who walked around the crossing gates and onto the tracks between Coon Creek and Anoka MN. Engine 261 was examined for damage and the train continued after a delay of 107mins.

A woman passenger preparing to board the southbound SILVER METEOR, train 87, at Newark was stabbed and killed on the main station concourse. Newark police arrested the alleged assailant.

A male passenger on the CITY OF NEW ORLEANS, train 59 of Mar 11, was removed by ambulance at Hammond LA.

Two passengers who were to detrain the southbound COAST STARLIGHT (train 11 of Mar 11) were mistakenly carried on to San Jose instead of Oakland. They were returned by taxi.

No standees were reported on Amtrak trains today.

A special train was run Miami to Washington for a Safety Patrol group.

Train 751, the WILLAMETTE VALLEY, was delayed 27mins at Portland while engine 353 was substituted for 217, which had air leaks.

The BANKERS, train 142, was delayed 21mins at Washington with mechanical problems in engine 972.

The NEW YORKER, train 202, was delayed 20mins when car 5480 had sticking brakes and had to be removed from the train consist.

The COLONIAL, train 174, lost 18mins when engine 970 had sticking brakes.

Departure of train 227, the RITTENHOUSE, was delayed 18mins at New York by sticking brakes on unit 584.

The TWILIGHT LIMITED, train 354, was delayed 43mins at Chicago by mechanical problems with engine 356.

The INTER-AMERICAN, train 21, was delayed 54mins at Chicago when engine 285 required replacing a defective communicating system box. The train was delayed 22mins more at St. Louis when the HEP gearcase of engine 285 was overfilled with lube oil.

The SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR, train 5 of Mar 11, was delayed 15mins at Denver when engine 315 was removed because of thin flange wheels at #1 pair. UP engine 3652 was substituted, and would run thru to Oakland.

The LAKE SHORE LIMITED, train 49, was delayed 46mins at Albany when car 4649 was removed because of brake failure.

Train 19, the CRESCENT, was delayed a total of 77mins in the Corridor because of mechanical problems with engine 964, an air hose parting between cars 2932 and 20114, and substitute engine 958 hitting debris on the track at Stemmer's Run.

Train 60, the MONTREALER, was delayed 22mins by slow orders and by removing disorderly passengers.

The SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR, train 5 of this date, was delayed 33mins by a small detour around broken rails before Creston IA.

The SUNSET LIMITED, train 1 of Mar 11, already late due to the SP derailment (see above) lost 25mins at El Paso in removing an injured passenger. Total lateness now 440mins.

The INTER-AMERICAN, train 22, is 63mins late at Little Rock, much of the time lost due to freight train interference on the Santa Fe.

The SOUTHWEST LIMITED, train 3 of Mar 11, is 74mins late at Needles, the major portion of that due to a broken-down freight ahead between Winslow and Needles. Train 4 of Mar 11 is 23mins late at Newton due to railroad problems mostly unreported.

The INTER-AMERICAN, train 24, is 40mins late at Temple due to yesterday's freight derailment and other freight and maintenance of way interference.

★ TRAVEL AGENTS EXAMINE THE SUPERLINERS ★

by Sylvia and Ted Blishak

Oakland CA Amtrak Station, March 4:

"Amtrak's Super Superliners are here," read the invitation, "and you are cordially invited to attend a reception celebrating the arrival of our newest fleet of 'high, wide, and beautiful' equipment." A champagne reception aboard Superliner equipment was Amtrak's method of introducing Amtrak-appointed travel agents to the new equipment.

We sploshed thru deep puddles in the dark, rainy night, following the siren growl of the engine, and climbed aboard the display consist. This was our first look at the long-awaited Sightseer lounge car (labelled "Lounge Cafe" in Superliner script letters). Upstairs at the bar, champagne was flowing and the place was solid with travel agents and Amtrak and SP staff. Here we encountered Reg Bell, Amtrak's Regional Sales Director.

"We had 350 RSVP's," Reg told us, "and in spite of the weather, over 300 have shown up. We feel that agents need to see Superliner for themselves in order to sell it effectively--word of mouth advertising is the best kind." Reg says his office has received many letters from passengers praising the new equipment and good service.

We were interrupted by a voice on the PA system exclaiming proudly, "If you'll look out the left side of the train, you'll see another on-time arrival of Amtrak's COAST STARLIGHT." Sure enough, it was exactly 8:25pm! Only the truly dedicated railfans among us rushed out into the storm to see the STARLIGHT.

"Altho our on-time performance has improved with the reliable new equipment," Reg continued, "we have had some delays due to bad weather recently. But passengers enjoy the Superliners so much that they never complain about delays like they used to--it's like the difference between night and day!"

Someone asked Reg if he was worried about the Reagan administration's threats to cut Amtrak's budget. "Amtrak has been thru other crises, with other administrations, but has kept improving anyhow. We're going strong now--the new equipment has really captured the public's interest, and we haven't even advertised Superliners very much yet! All the West Coast trains are using new equipment. On Feb 27 all the SUNSET LIMITED's consist were replaced by Superliners. Amtrak has a lot of momentum now!"

Ruth Gehrts, an agent from Shingle Travel in Marysville, told Reg, "There's a lot of excitement in our town about the plan to have the STARLIGHT stop there, and our Amtrak bookings are way ahead of last year. I drove for 2½ hours to see the Superliner, and it's even better than I expected! I've already had some clients aboard who gave me good reports."

We decided to explore, and went downstairs where the barman there was dispensing champagne. We introduced ourselves to an agent, Russ Ventro, from House of Travel in Santa Clara, and asked his opinion of Amtrak's new equipment.

"I've ridden most trains in the U.S. over most routes" he confided, "including the PANAMA LIMITED back in 1938 or '39. I think Amtrak is doing a heck of a good job now with this new equipment, especially the dining car and this Lounge Cafe. Look at the color, the space--it all creates a grand atmosphere! You'd want to ride a long way on this train. Superliner was inspired by the Santa Fe's EL CAPITAN equipment, but this train seems wider and taller; there's really no comparison. This Superliner just sells itself when you see it--the pictures I've seen don't do it justice.

"I think this proves that the U.S. has come back to rail travel. When you consider the cost of gas, it makes sense. I think people will leave their cars home on long trips and take the Superliner. You can travel in total relaxation--you

feel you could just stay aboard forever! I'm glad I took the time to come see it for myself."

Next we approached Colleen Teberg (of Travel Network Livermore) and Rita Inman (General World Travel, San Francisco). "It's so much better than the old equipment." "I'll leave tomorrow on this train; why go back to work?" "We'll really be able to sell Amtrak now!" were some of their comments. They both admitted to being rail buffs, altho they hadn't ridden on trains for several years. Both are from railroad families--Rita had an uncle who worked for SP; Colleen's father was a railroad man (entitling her to a pass until she was 18). "I sure wish I had that pass now!" she said.

Busy pouring champagne was Larry Smith of Amtrak's Commissary Service in Oakland. "This is my first chance to work on board," he said, "since I'm not part of the on-board service staff. Our biggest problem is getting enough people to staff these cars; this one, for instance, needs two people, since there is a bar on each level. There are some minor bugs in the new equipment--like doors not staying closed" (he paused to close one of the refrigerator doors that had come open) "and electrical failures. But they're doing a good job on repairs, and the Head-End Power is the beauty of it. Now that everything is standardized, it's easier to fix--before, we had a collection of cars built at different times by different companies."

Behind his bar, where both drinks and snacks are served, Mr. Smith pointed out a microwave oven, two convection ovens, six refrigerators and an air conditioning vent to keep him cool while operating all these electrical gadgets. "Basically, the change is this," he concluded, "now we have happy crews and happy passengers."

Karen Hernandez, of Amtrak's San Francisco sales office, told us she had been aboard the STARLIGHT two weeks ago, and said that the upstairs bar was closed. The spiral staircase between the two levels was filled with thirsty travelers waiting to order at the downstairs bar. She thinks it would improve service tremendously to have the upstairs bar staffed at cocktail hours, and to have a steward going thru the cars to sell drinks and snacks. "Like the old 'candy butchers' the DAYLIGHT used to have," we agreed. (Karen, a member of the younger generation, had never heard that term.)

Karen wants to take her next vacation trip on a Superliner, but told us, "It's very hard for Amtrak employees to get aboard, since we travel on 'space available' passes. First class is usually a sellout these days."

Over by the piano bar, we recognized Linda Quinn, of Erdmann Travel Center in Los Altos. (Sylvia had last seen Linda on a travel agent's tour on the Ferrocarril de Chihuahua al Pacifico to the Copper Canyon area of Mexico.) "How do you like the Superliner?" we asked.

"Well, this is the first train I've seen since the Chihuahua Pacific," she enthused, "and my immediate reaction was that it is nice to see a train with clean windows! I haven't been selling much Amtrak, but I know I'll sell it more now. It's ideal for groups--I'll put them on Superliners instead of buses. I think they look better than the European trains I've seen."

Jack Henderson of Henderson Travel, San Bruno, came in from the rain with a report on the STARLIGHT consist. Jack, who had admitted to having some nostalgia about the old equipment when it was about to be phased out, has become a Superliner convert. "It's fantastic," Jack exclaimed, "especially with the Lounge Cafe--I'm ready to take another long trip by train!"

He added, "We need all the new equipment Amtrak can provide--we could sell more seats if they were available! Too often, everything is sold out and we simply can't accommodate all the people who want to travel by Amtrak."

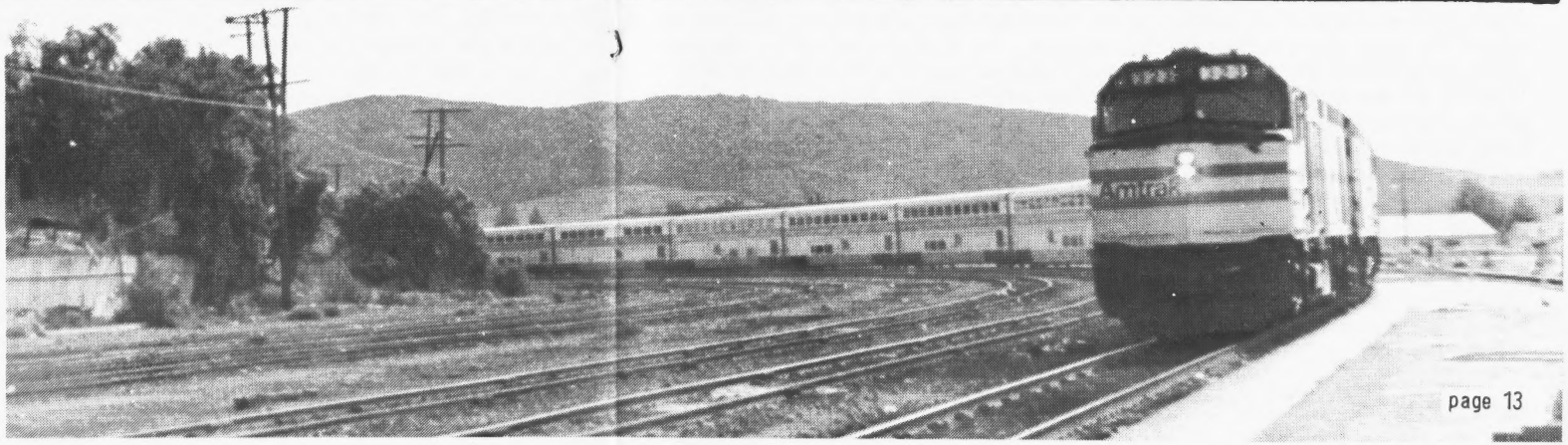
Ellen Uhrbroch, of Bungey Travel in Palo Alto, told us that her agency stopped selling Amtrak a few months ago. "We had too many complaints. People would take part of their trip, the equipment would break down or the air conditioning would fail, and they'd fly home and bring the train tickets back for a refund."

Asked for her opinion of Superliners, Ellen sat down in one of the swivel chairs in the upstairs Lounge Cafe and sighed, "I may never fly again if I can travel on a train like this! Twenty-five years ago was the era of the great trains--but this modern train has the same atmosphere that I remember from years back. It even has that wonderful train smell! The staff on board are the same sort of people I remember--they fit! And don't these travel agents look different from the travel agents you see at an airline function or a steamship reception?"

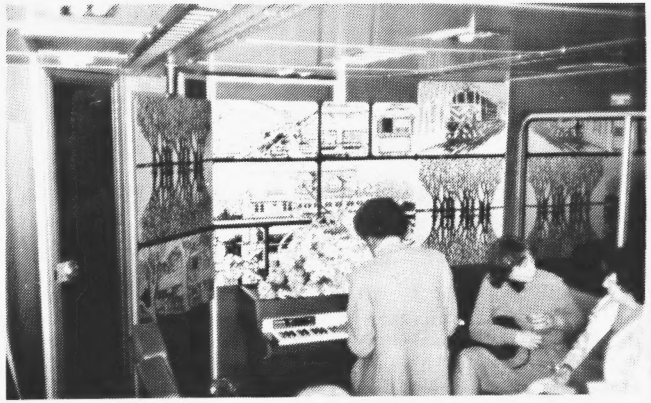
We looked around. Nobody was wearing an engineer's hat or a 4449 T-shirt, but they were certainly people who looked like they belonged on a train! "Probably the only agents who do much Amtrak business these days are railfans," we agreed.

"I'd like to start selling Amtrak again," Ellen said, "and that's what I'll tell my manager tomorrow!"

(Many travel agents don't handle Amtrak. The tickets and reservations are handled in an entirely different way than the airlines, and many agents just don't want to bother learning how to book Amtrak. For example, in Menlo Park, where our agency is located, there are 14 travel agencies, but only six of us sell Amtrak tickets.)



The northbound COAST STARLIGHT pulls into San Luis Obispo on a February afternoon. This and most Western trains now use the new Superliner cars, and they are proving extremely popular with Amtrak patrons--trains are sold out well in advance. RTN photo.



Travel agents are entertained in the piano bar of the Lounge Cafe. An Amtrak man said that reaction to the showing was mostly positive, but that one agent turned up her nose at the car, saying that it reminded her of a bar, and she never goes to bars. Photo by the authors.

Amtrak's Steve Liebhart, Chief-Sales Support for the Western Region, told us that in his territory, the 11 Western states, Amtrak's travel agency sales are up an impressive 60% for the 12-month period ending in Nov 1980. And many agencies are now applying for permission to sell Amtrak tickets--436 have recently applied.

Repeated pleas for us to vacate the train so it could be cleaned and serviced for tomorrow's SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR were needed to get agents off the train--nobody wanted to leave, altho many of us had long drives ahead of us.

As we finally stepped off (onto a stepbox marked "Houston, Texas" in white chalk) into the dark, stormy night, we looked up at the second level of the sleeper with its warm, muted lighting.

"Doesn't that look cozy and luxurious?" someone remarked. "I'd rather be up there than heading for a drive home to Vacaville."

FROM THE NATION'S PRESS
What the Media Are Saying About the Amtrak Budget

*** From a Los Angeles Times editorial (Mar 25):

"Whether by accident or by design, the White House is pushing a proposal along a fast budget track that could wipe out Amtrak, the national rail passenger service. The proposal is shortsighted, wrongheaded and possibly even underhanded. Congress needs to flag the plan down before it does permanent damage to a system that the nation needs now and that it will need even more as energy costs push other forms of transportation out of reach of travelers. ...Congress should refuse to let the Administration railroad the railroad. The country nearly lost its passenger system once. It has taken 10 years of hard work and the investment of billions of dollars to restore the fleet and make people want to travel on trains again. Letting that investment of time and money slip away for the sake of saving $240 million would be the falsest kind of economy."

*** From a Macon (GA) Telegraph & News editorial (Mar 15):

"Reducing Amtrak to a $613 million service confined to the lucrative Northeast Corridor between Boston and Washington will not only doom the dream of a Savannah-Macon-Atlanta service but will also require a wasteful storing of new equipment destined for routes that will have to be scrapped. The nation's energy bill is apt to rise, as more dependence on the petroleum-fed plane and auto will be signalled by every rail line less."

*** From KCBS radio (San Francisco) Newsmagazine talk show (Mar 25):

"Moderator: Larry, what's the mood there among your agency and among the other agencies that are faced with these massive budget cuts?

Larry Gilson (Amtrak VP-Government Affairs): Well, I wouldn't describe it as a mood of boundless enthusiasm. I think it's a difficult time in Washington and I want to show some sympathy for the Congress. They are forced to grapple with some very difficult tradeoffs, public policy tradeoffs between the legitimate objective which we share of trying to get the budget under control and help the economy turn around and at the same time not abandon public programs which are clearly cost-effective. We think we are in the cost-effective category. I guess I'd say we're optimistic because we have a good story to tell. We have a brand new equipment fleet, we have a greatly reduced record of complaints from riders, our revenue is up, our ridership is up, our trains are performing well, we have new equipment in the West on every route or will have by the end of this fall. And that's a record of performance that we're conveying to the Congress, and we hope they will support us in the Congress in the way the public is supporting us by riding the trains."

*** From Dayton (OH) Journal Herald editorial (Feb 11):

"...this is hardly an appropriate time to apply rigid profitability standards to what's left of the nation's once-mighty rail network--and cut a grand total of $380 million from Amtrak's 1982 subsidy."

*** Letter by Prof. William Thoms to Wall Street Journal (Mar 24):

"Your March 12 editorial on budget cutting repeated the same old tired canard about empty Amtrak trains rolling across the Western prairies. Obviously your editorials are written by someone who always travels by air, for the fact is that the empty Amtrak train is a myth, as any Westerner who has tried to get a train reservation recently can tell you."

*** From New Orleans Times-Picayune editorial (Mar 21):

"Amtrak was an idea that was fine in theory but has not worked out in practice. ...passengers did not get aboard in enough numbers either to reduce the necessary subsidy or to clearly justify it."

(Pro-Amtrak editorials were seen in these newspapers: Chicago Tribune, Sacramento (CA) Union, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Milwaukee Sentinel, Milwaukee Journal, Harrisburg Patriot, Syracuse Herlad-American, Chicago Sun-Times, and Kansas City Star.)

AMTRAK BOARD MEETING by Erich Houchens

The Amtrak Board of Directors' monthly meeting was held in Washington on Mar 25. Awaiting action were five Commitment Approval Requests.

The first CAR (81-65) was to repair and upgrade the Coffee Creek Bridge in Porter IN, on the Chicago-Detroit line. It handles 8 Amtrak trains a day. Repairing it will permit the speed limit to be raised to 79mph. This CAR for $139,370 was approved by the board.

The second CAR (81-66) was for $2,285,850 to be used for the rerouting of the Washington section of the BROADWAY LIMITED via Cumberland (to start Oct 1). The plan calls for building a connection between the Chessie System (B&O) and Conrail in Pittsburgh, and other track and station improvements. The board was told that this rerouting would result in two hours being cut off the Washington-Chicago running time. When it came time to vote, the DOT representative urged the board to delay this CAR until Congress approves Amtrak's FY82 budget. To this Alan Boyd replied that if Amtrak waits until Congress passes Amtrak's FY82 budget, which could take most of the summer, the connection in Pittsburgh could not be built in time for the Oct 1 rerouting. With that the board approved this CAR with only the DOT representative voting no.

The third CAR (81-67) was for changing a lease agreement with IBM from a month-to-month lease to a 2-year lease. This new 2-year lease agreement, which covers remote access data processing equipment, will save Amtrak $179,000 over the former month-to-month agreement. The board approved it.

The fourth CAR (81-68) which also covered computers was for the purchase, resale and leaseback of IBM tape peripherals. The board approved this CAR.

The fifth CAR (80-211-S1) was for Amtrak's share of the costs of starting a new Illinois 403-B train to Decatur IL. It will consist of extending trains 380 and 381 for 47 miles from Champaign to Decatur over the ICG. Startup is set for Oct 1. The board approved this CAR for $540,730.

The next Amtrak board meeting will be held on Thursday, Apr 30, the day before Amtrak's tenth anniversary. All former board members as well as Roger Lewis and Paul Reistrup have been invited to attend. Persons wishing to attend should call 202-383-3000 the day before to learn the time and place of the meeting.

Mixed Train of Thoughts

AMTRAK'S FARE INCREASE coming Apr 26 will be 9%, the corporation announced on Mar 26. Some fare increases, however, will be as high as 13%, and there will be 5% or no increases in some special instances, Amtrak said. Most fares between points served by a "showcase" train such as the BROADWAY LIMITED will go up 13%, but there will be no increase on intra-state service in Texas nor between Eugene and Portland OR, where special promotional fares have been instituted, Amtrak said. RTN has learned also that the single-person rate for a deluxe Superliner bedroom is being dropped; there will be only one charge for the deluxe bedroom regardless of the number of people in it (plus the transportation charge, of course). The new charge is the same as the present double-person charge, plus the coming 9% increase.....

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APRIL 26 SCHEDULE changes on Amtrak: The New York-Toronto service will be named the MAPLE LEAF (trains 63-64.) The northbound train will leave New York's Grand Central Terminal at 8:45am and reach Toronto at 8:30pm. The southbound will depart Toronto at 9:05am and reach New York at 8:50pm. The daily train will be Amfleet. A new 403-B train sponsored by Pennsylvania DOT, the FORT PITT (nos. 37, 38 and 39) will begin operation, using equipment of trains 46 and 47 (the PENNSYLVANIAN), and running between Pittsburgh and Altoona. Train 38 will leave Pittsburgh daily at 5:40pm, reaching Altoona at 8:17pm. Train 37 Mon-Fri leaves Altoona at 6am and reaches Pittsburgh at 8:37am. Train 39 (Sat & Sun) leaves Altoona at 7:15am and arrives Pittsburgh at 9:52am. Stops for the Amfleet train aremade in Johnstown, Latrobe, Greensburg. There are time changes for the BROADWAY LIMITED and the LAKE SHORE LIMITED. The BROADWAY will leave NY at 2:45pm, Washington at 1:30pm, and reach Chicago at 9:15am. It will leave Chicago at 7:45pm and arrive Washington at 4:44pm and NY at 4:09pm. The LAKE SHORE will leave NY at 7:15pm, leave Boston at 5:15pm, and reach Chicago at 2:27pm. It will depart Chicago at 3:25pm and arrive Boston at 2:12pm and New York at 12:12pm. The Washington section of the BROADWAY will run north to Philadelphia on the rear of train 142 and south from Philadelphia on the rear of train 171.....

THE EMPIRE BUILDER will leave Chicago at 12:10pm and reach Seattle at 8:55am. Eastbound it departs Seattle at 4:50pm and reaches Chicago at 5:47pm. From Jun 11 to Sep 12 it will run daily from Chicago; it will run daily from Seattle Jun 11 to Sep 13. The COAST STARLIGHT's schedule is shortened 52mins each direction on the Portland-L.A. segment. It will leave Portland at 4:05pm (as now) and reach Oakland at 7:50am and L.A. at 7:10pm. Northbound it leaves L.A. at 10:45am (45mins later) and reaches Oakland at 8:55pm and Portland at 1:50pm, and Seattle at 6:05pm. The PIONEER will discontinue its stops at Brigham City and Mountain Home, and will initiate stops at Cache Junction UT and Cascade Locks OR. That train will get Superliner coach service, with one coach running thru to Chicago via the SAN FRANCISCO

ZEPHYR. The SF ZEPHYR will arrive Ogden eastbound at 6:20am to make a connection to the D&RGW's RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR. The DESERT WIND gets a Superliner diner Apr 1. In Michigan, the promised station stop at Michigan City is introduced, with the WOLVERINE, train 350, stopping there at 8:56am, the BLUE WATER LIMITED, train 364 at 5:21pm and train 365 at 10:20am, and train 355, the TWILIGHT LIMITED, at 8pm. The INTER-AMERICAN will get Superliner cars Apr 26 (a fact which will not be listed in the timetable, tho), and it will have the new diners, coaches and sleepers, but no lounge cafe.....

SLEEPING CAR SERVICE on the SHENANDOAH will be discontinued. The 10/6 sleeper on the NIGHT OWL will be listed as operating "seasonally." That means that it will be off the train in the summer (perhaps May 21?) when Amtrak says it is needed more elsewhere. Reportedly Amtrak found that most of its riders are Amtrak NE Corridor pass riders. NE Corridor changes include dropping of all Saturday Metroliner service with only a few Metroliners running on Sunday afternoon. On Saturday mornings a 7am and an 8am "conventional" train will leave Washington running on a schedule 5mins slower than the Metroliners they replace. Northbound from Washington, all conventional trains will depart on the half hour instead of 10mins after the hour: 7:30am Bos, 8:30am NY (#50's cars), 9:30am Bos, 10:30am NY (#20), 11:30am Bos, 12:30Bos, 1:30 Spr & #441's cars, 2:30 Bos, 3:30 NY, 4:30 Bos, 5:35 (#60), 6:30 NY, 7:30 NY (Sun only), 8:30 NY (daily), 10:30 Bos. Other changes include a nonstop run for two trains between Providence and New Haven; a slight decrease in Metroliner running times to 3hrs, 29mins for all trains; thru cars off the CARDINAL will run in the Corridor leaving Washington at 8:30am and New York at 4pm; all Metroliners will have club car service. An error in the coming timetable: the services listing for the MONTREALER will show the train with a dining car in English but an Amdinette in French.....

AMTRAK'S TRAIN NAMING Department is at it again: four new names on the Empire Service are the MOHAWK, the STORM KING, the BEAR MOUNTAIN, and the ELECTRIC CITY LIMITED. The 7am Saturday train out of Washington will be called the METROPOLITAN (train 130).....

THE NORTH STAR got discontinuance notices posted north of Minneapolis and to Duluth on Apr 1, as the state has not come up with the funds to cover the train beyond April. It will be gone on Amtrak's birthday if the money, which the governor pointedly left out of the budget, is not forthcoming. Incidentally, the report last issue, from an Amtrak source, that the train had received full HEP diners, was erroneous. They were on only for a test. Cars 8517 and 8518 made several road tests on the train before being sent East for the SILVER METEOR.....

TWO SUPERLINER SLEEPERS run regularly on the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR and (we think) on the EMPIRE BUILDER. The COAST STARLIGHT has a second one as an overflow sleeper on about half the days, Amtrak said.....

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AMTRAK TRAINS EMPTY? The DOT has been actively spreading this lie around the country, on radio, on TV and at public appearances. To help counter this, Amtrak issued a fact sheet on Apr 2 indicating an "unprecedented demand" for its service. In March, the sheet says, at least 6100 standees were counted on Amtrak trains. As of Apr 1, 645 trains between April and September have all their coach and sleeper space sold out--623 of them outside the NE Corridor. Nearly 13,500 would-be passengers are on waiting lists. In one reservation center alone, more than 2000 names are on waiting lists for the NY-Florida trains for a 10-day period coming up. Systemwide, over 40% of all coach space is booked two weeks ahead, and more than one-third of the space thru the Easter holidays. More than 2/3 of all overnight accommodations are booked thru the Easter holidays. In January, Amtrak noted, the COAST STARLIGHT and the EMPIRE BUILDER each averaged over 600 passengers per train, and the two Florida trains averaged over 1700 a day for both. (This in the traditionally slow January month. A reader who lives on the EMPIRE BUILDER line points out that that train had almost as many riders in Jan as did

the BROADWAY LIMITED, which runs more than twice as often.) Amtrak also said its reservations centers are being "overwhelmed"--with call volume up 7.3% this fiscal year. The number of Amtrak complaints is down 40% systemwide, and 80% on some routes. Most complaints now are about standees and overcrowding, Amtrak said. Last August, it pointed out, over 400,000 people were denied space on the SOUTHWEST LIMITED, SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR and EMPIRE BUILDER due to soldout conditions, and Amtrak expects the same situation this summer. Amtrak said that it could easily sell seats in 300 more cars per day in peak periods if it had the cars.....

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THE HOOSIER STATE had its "biggest Tuesday ever" on Mar 31, when over 500 passengers rode the train.....

STATE OF MICHIGAN is still planning for a 403-B train Grand Rapids to Chicago to start up Oct 1.....

STATE OF MONTANA in late March passed enabling legislation to allow it to pick up part of the costs of running the EMPIRE BUILDER. An unconfirmed report says that Nebraska is considering the same thing.....

AUTO-TRAIN CORPORATION is apparently going to be purchased by a private group of investors. On Mar 25 the company's bankruptcy trustee announced the agreement in principle, pending the approval of a Federal bankruptcy judge. In other Auto-Train news, an 11-bedroom sleeper of the company's, "Natural Bridge", former Amtrak #2241 (still in Amtrak paint and number) was destroyed by an arson in a storage yard west of Sanford FL on Mar 21. Auto-Train now has two Amtrak SDP locos in operation. On Mar 22 the train arrived Sanford with Amtrak engines 618 & 649, A-T engine 4009 (U36), and E8 units 434 and 420. But the same day the company cancelled its runs, for the second time in March, normally a busy season. On the 26th a 40-car train left Sanford with two U36 locos for power. At the same time, a southbound 40-car train arrived with the two Amtrak SDPs. Operating U36's now number four: 4002, 4003, 4006 & 4009. Units 4000, 4005, 4007 & 4011 are idle, along with four E8s.....

FIESTA RAIL 200 will be held at L.A. Union station May 15-17, 10am to 6pm. The 4449 steam loco, after its display in Sacramento, will visit L.A. for the occasion. It will leave Sacramento May 12, traveling via the San Joaquin Valley, for display in L.A. the 13th & 14th. It leaves L.A. May 15 just after the STARLIGHT and travels via the Coast Route to Sacramento. May 16 it leaves for Portland (see Rail Fantrips), and after its arrival there it will be painted in BN green for a series of excursions on BN in the Northwest as part of "Operation Lifesaver" to publicize grade crossing safety.....

CHICAGO'S CNW STATION was refused landmark status Mar 2, thus clearing the way for its demolition.....

AMTRAK'S FAMILY DAYS in Seattle Mar 21-22 were a great success, with about 30,000 people appearing to look at the Superliners and take a sample ride to Edmonds. The Seattle Times noted: "But if the budget recommended by President Reagan passes in Congress, it will be like letting children romp through a shopful of new toys, then locking them out and throwing away the key".....

WIND-BLOWN GRASS FIRE on Mar 17 burned part of the ICG trestle over Bonnet Carre Spillway, knocking out the mainline between La Branch and Frenier LA, about 10mis north of New Orleans. It was expected to be out of service 10-14 days. The CITY OF NEW ORLEANS was originating and terminating at McComb MS, with passengers bused between there and New Orleans.....

PRESIDENT OF ARCO took a train trip from Denver to L.A. His private train was seen leaving Salt Lake City westbound on the UP at 4:45am on Mar 25, and consisting of SD40 engine #3733, caboose 25451, and private heavyweight car #33.....

ON-TIME PERFORMANCE of Amtrak for Jan was that month's best in Amtrak's history--81.8% overall, with short distance 82.7 and long distance 77.9. (In February the COAST STARLIGHT was 100% on time--other figures no available yet).....

News in this issue is updated thru Apr 2, 1981.

CARS & CONSISTS

*SOUTHWEST LIMITED, train 4, Kansas City Mar 15: engines 291 (F40), 511 (SDP), 250 (F40); cars 1248, 1203, Hi-level 39926, Superliner 31016, Hi-level 39957, Superliners 34029, 38030, slprs 32027 & 32023, deadheads 10601 buffer car, dorms 1553, 1551, 1552, slprs 2201 "Silver Quail", 2154 "Silver Orchid". Train 4, same, Mar 24: engines 288 (F40), 626 (SDP), 323 (F40); cars 1219, 1165, Hi-level 39929, Superliner 31034, Hi-level 39958, Superliners 34061, 33017 lounge, 38033, slprs 32035, 32046, deadheads 10610 buffer car, diners 8038, 8024, 8043, 8040.

*CRESCENT, train 20, Newark Feb 20: engine 960 (E60); cars 1165, 1622, 4733, 4631, 4739, 4622, 3119, 8513, 2434 "Pacific Plateau", 2451 "Birch Grove", 21223, 21110, 21024, 4740.

*SUPER CONTINENTAL, VIA train 3, Vancouver Feb 24: engines VIA 6502 & 6602; cars 9485, 5640, 5706, dome "Jasper", 1346, "Emerald", "Chateau Latour".

*SILVER METEOR, train 87, Trenton Mar 8: engine 955 (E60); cars 1089, 1409, 2676, 2023, 5427, 5411, 5012, 5016, 3300, 8004, 4466, 5015, 4552, 5677, 5422, 8384, 2927, 2854.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"In the lounge car, Peter and Alice Parfitt sit at the picture windows--curved into the ceiling looking south. Between Los Angeles and Chicago, the Times interviewed 25 passengers and train crew members, all but four of whom voted for President Reagan last November. Many, like the Parfitts, still support him. Also like the Parfitts, however, the Reagan supporters disagree with the administration's plan to slash the Amtrak budget--by a margin of 20 to 1, though the interviews were conducted at random and focused primarily on passengers who had started out on the train in Los Angeles.

"It is the Parfitts' first train trip, they say, in 25 years...

"(Mr. Parfitt) continues. 'Right off the top of my head,' he says, 'I would say that trains of this type will come back more and more for the same reasons I took it this time. People will rediscover the fun, the leisure and the convenience. Should it be required to make money? No. For the good of the people, I think the trains ought to be subsidized. I think Amtrak should be expanded and increased in its service.'"

--Allan Parachini in Los Angeles Times, Mar 29.

SLIP OF THE MONTH CLUB***

"Mr. Regan estimated that half the wasteful practices could be eliminated unilaterally by the M.T.A. and the other half through contract renegotiation. The practices he cited included: ... Giving construction flagmen nine and a half hours pay for eight hours of work because the extra pay was tacked on years ago to cover time for refueling kerosene lamps. The practice continues to cost $1 million, although the lamps are no longer used. $1 million, costing $1 million"

--New York Times, Mar 13.

(Got you the first time.)

"The French National Railroads carry 700 million passengers a year, about seven times the traffic of Amtrak."

--Mike Shoup in the Washington Post, Nov 30, 1980.

(Amtrak must have a lot of standees.)

"A spokesman for Amtrak in Chicago estimated that more than 3,000 football fans will ride the rails to the game. 'We have sold out trains in general, especially the sleeping cars,' he said. 'There may be some reserved coach space available from Jackson to Hattiesburg, Miss., but there's no guarantee of a seat.'"

--New Orleans Times-Picayune, Jan 23.

(Then there's the 21-hour layover and the change of trains from the CITY OF NEW ORLEANS to the CRESCENT.)

RAIL FANTRIPS

Jul 18-19: Denver Mile High RAILFAIR RR show--railroadiana, models, layouts, movies, door prizes incl RGZ tickets. 100 exhibits. Send #10 SSAE w/35¢ postage for details to NRHS, PO Box 5181 TA Denver CO 80217, Dept. RTN.

Apr 25: Farewell to the S-Motor excursion, 1st over Harlem & Hudson lines since 1976. Lv Grand Central 9am, back 5:30. Incl "Phoebe Snow" lounge-obs. $25, parlor $45. Elec Railroaders Ass'n c/o J Erlitz, 90-31 Whitney, Elmhurst NY 11373.

4449 steam excursion, Portland-Sacramento, sb Apr 24-26, nb May 16-18. Info: Bay Area Elec. RR Ass'n, PO Box 3694 San Francisco 94119 (415-673-6547); or Trip Chmn, NRHS Central Coast Chap, 850 Steiner St, San Francisco CA 94117.

One Rail Fantrips listing is free. Send full info to:
RAIL TRAVEL NEWS, Fantrips Dept, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

RIDING MEXICO'S "WILD WEST" TRAIN

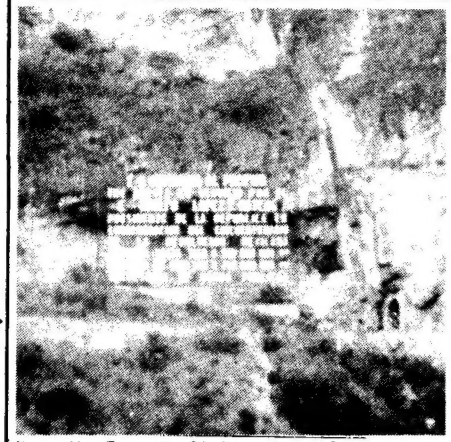
(continued from page 4)

Blanca asks what they are for, and the fireman points to a safety diagram which indicates they are fire extinguishers. Since they are no bigger than oranges, we assume they are for small fires!

We introduce ourselves to our engineer, Mr. Alvino Ruiz Castillo. We learn that he was driving steam engines at the age of 18. He has been a railroad man for 24 years, and was at the throttle for the last run of steam over this line in 1971. He says that for comfort, diesels have the advantage, but for excitement, nothing can beat the steam engine! To indicate his love of steam, Mr. Castillo is wearing a blue denim engineer's cap. (We notice that the other crew members, like their American counterparts who work on diesels, prefer baseball-type caps.) Mr. Castillo offers each of us a turn at the right-hand seat and lets us wear his cap while we take each other's pictures. This maneuver must be done carefully, as he has to keep his foot on the "deadman's pedal" until we are seated and can press it down ourselves.

There is a different feel to the ride up here in the cab. As we head into a curve, the nose of the engine goes straight, then jerks to one side as the trucks start to turn. The fireman insists that I stop leaning out the window to take pictures, as I could fall out!

A flagman waves us to a stop shortly before we arrive at Divisadero Barrancas. He climbs aboard and explains that there are two trains stopped there, the westbound passenger and a westbound freight. We pull into the station and switch over to the track at the far right. The freight has three of the leased Santa Fe diesels on the point, and is flying white flags.



Near the Temoris Station is a plaque on the hillside commemorating the completion of this Chihuahua Pacific line, built from scrap rails, with the letters about 2 feet high. Sylvia Blishak photographed it from the Fiat train during the trip described in our last issue.

We are stopping here for a two-day stay at the hotel, where Blanca and I will share a rustic room with a fireplace just ten feet from the canyon's rim! (Happily, there is a fence there so we can stand at the edge without scaring ourselves!) At night, we will hear freights coming up thru the mountain passes many miles before they reach us--otherwise, this primitive area has no sounds of civilization!

NOV. 11, 1980, Divisadero Barrancas:

We check out of the hotel and carry our luggage to the station platform, a short distance away. The eastbound train is two hours late, so we wait at the station with nothing to do but watch the Indians weave their baskets. (The more baskets the tourists buy, the faster they weave, and soon some of the travelers are loaded with a dozen or more handwoven mementos!) When the train arrives, a bright-orange diesel is at the point, and Mr. Castillo is the engineer! He waves and indicates that we should join him in the cab again, so we race aboard with our suitcases, deposit them in our coach, and are treated to a second cab ride! This time I am composed enough to remember that the diesel bears the number 1013, and was built in Chicago in 1975. There is no helper engine today.

MEXICO

As we leave the station and gain speed, I stand near the forward bulkhead, and can therefore see the tracks closer to the engine than Mr. Castillo, who is seated, can. As we round a blind curve, a white dog is wandering down the middle of the tracks--oblivious to our approach! No time for a translation--I grab the horn and give two blasts. The dog leaps clear just in time.

We cross under a bridge--odd, as there are no highways or other railroads here! A mile later, we cross over the very same bridge. This place is called "El Lazo", which means "the rope", as the track resembles a rope crossed over itself.

The fireman shows us the train orders or "flimsies" indicating the speed limits on each section of the track. Now we slow to a crawl for a steep cut called Cuatro Vientos. Mr. Castillo explains that here there is danger of falling rock, and a workman was killed by rocks last week.

We reach the highest point on the line --Los Ojitos, elevation 8072 feet. As we begin our downhill run, we have a sudden, unscheduled stop which is caused by a leak in the airbrake system. We decide that this would be a good time to return to our coach, and shake hands all around and say "Gracias." Unable to express my gratitude in detail in the Spanish language, I decide to present my treasured red-white-and-blue Amtrak pen to Mr. Castillo, who seems sincerely sorry to have us leave --the perfect host!

We walk back thru the train. Most of the passengers are men in Levis and cowboy boots. As the hours wear on, we notice a bottle of tequila passing from hand to hand among them.

The train resumes its journey and plunges into a downhill tunnel--only to stall again! The air becomes very smoky. After about 10 minutes and much hissing of compressed air, we are underway.

We decide to try dinner in the diner. Altho they are not officially open, we are permitted to take a seat and order some Carta Blanca. Soon a girl with a guitar arrives with some friends, who take a nearby booth and sing Spanish songs while they wait for dinner.

Finally the menus are presented. We are informed that only two items on it are available: hamburgers, or ham and cheese on white bread. We select the latter, which is edible (altho the potato salad on the side is not).

Darkness falls over the rugged mountains. This is dark with a capital D--no lights of houses, streetlights, or cars to be seen anywhere. We stop at La Junta station, where a crowd of local entrepreneurs board the train. They are peddling gum, juice, fritos, burritos, rugs, etc. Two youngsters, hoping for tips, plant themselves in the aisle and sing a loud duet in Spanish (not particularly well received by the passengers, but I give them pesos).

After more starts and stops and more airbrake problems, we arrive in Chihuahua after midnight, 2 1/2 hours behind schedule.

Semaphores. Cowboys and Indians. Cabooses and cab rides. It all sounds like a Hollywood version of a wild-west train ride! Perhaps you're wondering if I had one Margarita too many? Honest Injun, it all really happened!

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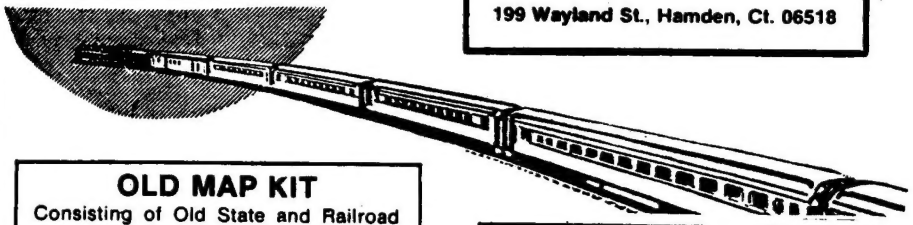

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